

**Rip Currents are  
killers. How  
you respond could  
make the difference  
between life  
and death.**

*Real Life, Real Stories...*

Hi. My name is Bill Proenza and I am the Director for the Southern Region of the National Weather Service. My experience with rip currents is first hand.



At the age of 11, I was swimming off the Florida Coast, near Key Biscayne, and found myself carried into deep water. I tried to swim toward shore but to no avail. After being pulled under the water once, I called for help. Fortunately, an experienced swimmer pulled me to safety.

Following this event, I took lessons through the Red Cross swimming program. While the program helped me improve my swimming ability, it did not offer much insight on handling what we called "undertows" (rip currents).

Nevertheless, the training did pay off two years later, when I had the chance to save a man who was trapped in a rip current, again off Florida's east coast. I noticed him struggling in the water and crying out for help. I swam behind him and managed to push him at an angle toward the shore. He told me he couldn't swim but found himself drawn into deeper and deeper water.

It is my hope that you take these safety rules and the dangers of rip currents to heart. If you do so, your trips to the coast should be pleasant, enjoyable and safe for you, your family and friends.

*Find the most up-to-date weather forecast at:*

**[www.srh.noaa.gov](http://www.srh.noaa.gov)**

*Learn more about **Rip Currents** at:*

**[www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov](http://www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov)**

No region of the National Weather Service offers more meteorological fascination and challenges than the Southern Region. The Southern Region states (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, most of Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Texas as well as the Republic of Puerto Rico) alone receive one third of all the rainfall in the USA, half of the nation's severe thunderstorm, flash flood and tornado events, and by far, the greatest number of tropical storm landfalls. In short, the Southern Region encompasses an area that is home to the most active weather in the world.



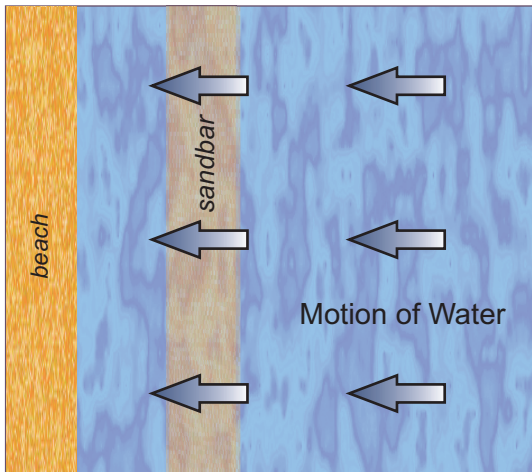
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# Rip

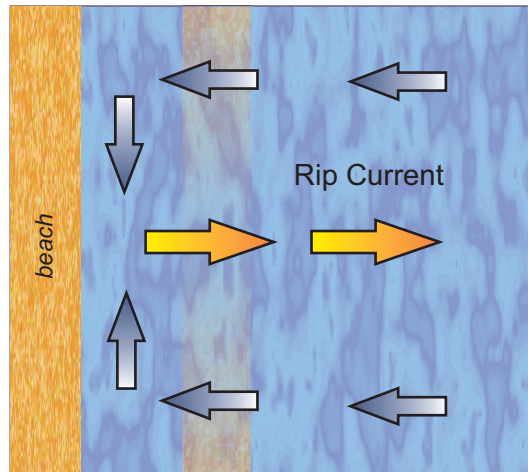
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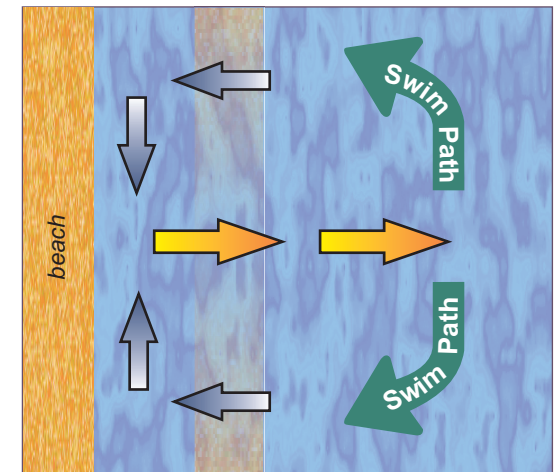
**national weather service**



Wind pushes water toward the shore over submerged sandbars



The weight of the water piled near the shore will rip an opening in the sandbar allowing water to rush seaward.



If caught in a rip current, swim parallel to the shore to escape the flow of water, then diagonally toward the shore.

## How a **Rip Current** forms

**Rip Currents** form when water, piled against the shore, begins to return to deeper water. Typically, the wind pushes the water over a sandbar allowing excess water to collect near the shore. Eventually, this excess water starts to flow seaward through low areas in the sandbar, “ripping” an opening.

**Rip Currents** occur at all surf beaches including those along both coasts, the Gulf of Mexico and the Great Lakes. Some rip currents last from a few minutes to a few hours, while more permanent ones, associated with groins and jetties, may last days.

*Other common names for rip currents:  
rips, rip tides, and runouts.*

## How to spot a **Rip Current**

**Rip Currents** are usually narrow near the beach (30 - 60 feet wide), increasing as they extend into deeper water. They can be seen from the shore by the color of the water. If the current has recently formed, you will see murky water (as compared to the surrounding water), as a result of sediment mixing. Longer lasting currents, having already scoured a path in the sandbar, will appear darker than the surrounding water.

**Rip Current** wave heights are lower and choppier. Look for objects or foam moving steadily seaward. Wearing polarized sunglasses can aid in locating the currents by cutting the glare. Also, look for posted flags or signs warning you of the danger.

## How to survive a **Rip Current**

**Know how to swim.** Always swim at guarded beaches and heed the beach patrol.

**Remain calm** and swim parallel to the shore if caught in a rip current. Attempts to swim directly toward shore can be fatal. Its force is too strong even for the strongest swimmers. Since rip currents are relatively narrow, you should be able to swim across them quickly. If you cannot break free of the current’s pull, float until it dissipates, then swim diagonally toward the shore.

**Use a flotation device** if you attempt to rescue someone from a rip current.